Anglican Church International

With Jesus, Death is No More

By

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This document is a religious sermon by The Rt. Rev. Dr. Michael W. Holland, focusing on the Christian faith's core belief in Jesus as the resurrection and the life. It explores the meaning of faith in Jesus, the concept of resurrection, and the practical implications of believing in Christ according to the Gospel of John. The sermon provides theological context, interpretation, and encouragement for believers to embody Christ's teachings in their daily lives.

Context of the Gospel of John

The sermon begins by explaining the unique perspective of the Gospel of John, where Jesus is presented as the "Word made flesh" or the Logos, a universal and philosophical concept representing Eternal Reason who is God and reveals God to humanity. This Gospel emphasizes Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, and highlights three key themes: signs (miracles), belief (trust and commitment), and life (the new spiritual life imparted to believers). These themes

structure John's Gospel, showing Jesus performing signs to reveal God, eliciting belief, and granting life to believers.

Last Week's Message: Seeing and Believing

The previous sermon focused on the theme of "seeing" as a metaphor for believing. It recounted the story of a formerly blind man who, after witnessing Jesus' works, came to believe and "see" the truth. This illustrates how believers must open themselves to the light of Christ to walk in faith and proclaim their transformation from blindness to sight.

Main Message: Jesus as the Resurrection and the Life

The central passage discussed is Jesus' declaration: "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die." The sermon explores the meaning of this statement, questioning the nature of "being" and "dying" in this context. It suggests that Jesus embodies the source of resurrection and life, offering believers both spiritual life now and eternal life beyond physical death. The distinction is made between physical death and spiritual death (living death), emphasizing that belief in Jesus leads to true life and prevents spiritual stumbling.

The problem of evil and suffering is also addressed through the story of Lazarus. The sermon reflects on why Jesus wept despite having the power to prevent Lazarus' death, suggesting that Jesus' tears express love and compassion for those who do not yet believe or are spiritually dead. Lazarus' death and resurrection serve as a sign for believers to witness God's glory and to strengthen faith.

What Seeing and Believing Entail: Life in Christ

Belief in Jesus is described as a transformative vision—a new way of seeing the world and one's purpose aligned with God's vision for humanity. The Word made flesh (Jesus) serves as a template for living, guiding believers to imitate Christ through acts of forgiveness, love, and proclamation of the Word. This living faith nourishes the soul and enables believers to become conduits of God's life-giving presence to others. Walking in the light of Christ means embodying this vision and sharing the bread of life, which is both spiritual sustenance and a call to active discipleship.

Conclusion: Faith Defines Our Response to Death

The sermon concludes by affirming that faith in Jesus transforms the believer's relationship with death. Whether facing a "living death" in this life or physical death at the end, with Jesus, death is no more. This assurance is central to Christian faith and defines the believer's hope and life purpose.

Closing Prayer and Blessings

The document ends with a prayer asking God for grace to love and desire what He commands and promises, so believers' hearts remain fixed on true joy through Jesus Christ. The bishop offers blessings and peace to all readers, underscoring the pastoral and encouraging tone of the sermon.

With Jesus, Death is No More

"**I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die."**

Believing this to be true is at the heart of the Christian faith, no, it is the heart! What it means to you will define for you your faith:

1. **What does it mean to say Jesus is (am) the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die?**

2. **Further, what is it to believe that Jesus is (am) the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die?**

3. **Finally, what does so believing entail with respect to our everydayness? What is its practical import?**

These issues are at the heart of the Gospel reading for today. Let us, then, move towards answering these questions. First, however, some context concerning the Gospel of John.

Context

[[Looking back from the perspective of the John's Gospel - For John Jesus was the Word made flesh. In the beginning there was the Word and the Word was … .

> The prologue (1:1-18) begins by using the term *word* to introduce the person of Christ. This term differs from those used in the other Gospels, for it does not connote any particular religious background. *Christ* is Jewish; *Lord* is Gentile; *Jesus* is human; but *Word* or *Logos* is philosophical. John thus makes the subject of his Gospel a universal figure, the incarnation of Eternal Reason who is God, who came from God, and who reveals God as a son reveals a father. He is to be apprehended by those who receive Him (1:12), and the conflict between those who receive Him and those who do not is likened to the conflict between light and darkness (Tenney, p.193)

Notably Christ, for John, just is Eternal Reason.

More background. What is the overriding point John is attempting to get across?

> The key to the content of the Gospel of John is the author's own statement in John 20:30,31:

> *Many other signs therefore did Jesus un the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name.*

[Central, then, is seeing Jesus is not just another man, but rather is Christ]

> Three words are prominent in this brief passage: *signs, believe, life.* [The signs are miracle Jesus performed for others and] operated precisely in the areas where man is unable to effect any change of laws or conditions which affect his life. … .

[So signs are God in Christ doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves by our willpower alone]

> The second word, *believe,* is the key word in the Gospel, … . It is customarily translated *believe,* though sometimes it is rendered *trust* or *commit* (see 2:24). … . John defines belief in Christ as receiving Him (1:12), making Him a part of one's life. … .

[So to "believe" in Christ is to make Him part of our lives. But how do we make Christ part of our lives?]

> The third word in the key to the Gospel is *life*, which, in Johanine language, is the sum total of all that is imparted to the believer in his salvation. … . Life, according to John, is not just animal vitality or the course of human existence. It involves a kind of nature, a new consciousness, interaction with environment, and constant development. Christ is presented as the example of this life which is God's gift to the Christian and God's goal for the Christian.

[So Christ is an example. Of what?]

> These three words, *signs, belief, life,* provide a logical organization for the Gospel. In the *signs* is the revelation of God; in *belief* is the reaction that they are designed to produce; in *life* is the result that belief brings. (Tenney, p.p. 189-191)

Last week Message:

Those to whom the formerly blind man was a witness of God's works were lost in and blinded by the law and the prejudices they derived from it; their resulting lack of openness to God in Christ. The formerly blind man came to "see" the Truth saying "Lord I believe." From time to time we are all closed to seeing the light of Christ in our lives, letting it in and radiate from us – closed to our true bread of life – and thus blind living in darkness. As we go about our week may God grant us the ability to be open to Him allowing His light to dwell in and radiate from us so that we might be able to walk in the light of

Christ and say to all the world "I once was lost, but now I am found; was blind, but now I SEE!"

The gospel reading for last week had primarily to do with seeing. Last week was mainly about seeing. As we have seen, for John, seeing is believing:

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A theme in the Gospel for this week too is seeing. But here we move a step further to what seeing entails > believing > life.

<u>Message</u>:

> ***"I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die."***

What, then, might have Jesus meant?

1. How does the verb "to be" function here? Is it one of identity – Jesus is one and the same as the resurrection and the life. But this cannot be for resurrection implies coming back into being and life seems to be being itself.

2. Perhaps what He means that through Him resurrection and life is had. All that is needed, He tells us, is that we believe in Him.

3. But this part of the passage seems not to make sense. He says that all who live and believe in Him will never die. How, then, is it possible for there to be people who believe in Him and die – "…, even though they die, will live, … ."

4. For that matter, what is it to die? Here, perhaps we have an equivocation on the word die. There is death and there is living death, physically alive but spiritually dead, or perhaps, not fulfilling our nature, fully being who God intended us to be, missing the mark so to speak. So, Jesus is the key to life here and now and the key to life eternal. Those who are physically alive, but missing the mark, who come to believe in Jesus find life here and now. And those who find life in Christ, are alive now, though they die they shall live – resurrection.

5. Consider the former. Perhaps one way we could take death is something akin to stumbling and falling. Those, Jesus tells us, who see the light of the world – which by the way is not the son, but rather something analogous to the sun, namely, Christ – do not stumble. On the other hand, those who walk at night stumble. What does this mean? Consider the following. As the sun illumines the way when we walk on Earth , so that we do not stumble, Christ illumines the way to living, being so that when we believe in Him and we walk in His light we do not stumble and live rather than die.

6. In any case, what is it to believe in Him? Here again we are confronted with the problem of evil. "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" The implication is that Jesus' weeping was not an indication of His love for Lazarus. For He had the power to save Lazarus from death; and, if He loved Lazarus He would have done so. Many have stopped believing in the existence of God on the basis of this problem, or, at least either questioned His power or His goodness. And we are tempted to do so given our confrontation with social unrest and wars.

7. For what was Jesus weeping? The death of a one He loved? His failure to save the one He loved? For those who still did not see, and believe – who were dying or already dead in Spirit?

8. Here is another question – did Lazarus die? There was the stench. Martha says when asked to remove the stone from the cave entrance, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." To which Jesus replied, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God." This seems to imply that Jesus said, "This illness does not lead to death; but rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of Man may be glorified through it." Ok, so a man will seem to die so that God might be glorified? REALLY! No. That he was actually dead is an essential part of this story. For so seeing leads us to believe Him and so not stumble and live? Regardless, what does seem clear is that Lazarus was dead from the point of view Martha, and we must admit, from our perspective, and he was resurrected. What, then, do we see?

9. Finally, what does seeing and believing entail? Life, yes, but how?

Tenney claims that in general, for John, the Word is something apprehended. If so, then the Word is something to be seen with the minds eye, something that once grasped moves the heart and the result is life in Christ here and now. What is seen is a new way of viewing the world and one's place/function in it. A new Vision, if you will, God's Vision, God's Vision for man, for man's fulfillment (our fulfillment) and the fulfillment of all His creation. And our fulfillment is life here and now and life eternal. We live by "believing" in Christ, making Him a part of our lives. And we do this by making ourselves in act in His Vision, by imitating Christ.

God made the Word flesh so that we might have a template, a guide, by which we can act into being, into life on the basis of that Vision, the Vision made flesh, the bread of life. When we eat the bread of life, which is to say proclaim act on the Word, forgiving others as we are forgiven by Him, loving others as we are loved by Him, we walk in His light, the light of Christ – we walk in the light of Christ – and find life in Him, dwell in Him and He in us. And in so walking God's gift to us through Christ by water and the Spirit spring forth through us to nourish others in our proclaiming the Word in thought, word, and deed. In so proclaiming, we feed our souls and He (the Word), through us, is for us and others, through our interactions with each other, our bread of life.

As food and water are to the body, so water and the Spirit, and the Word are to our selves. We walk in the light of Christ when we allow ourselves to be that through which God in Christ is the bread of life for each of us, for each other, when we say, I give my flesh, my self, my soul and body so that the light of Christ might shine forth through me for the life of the world.

"I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE" says the Lord. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die."

What we take this to mean will define our faith. And one thing, something we must keep in our hearts is this: regardless of whether it is a living death here and now, or death at the end of this life, WITH JESUS, DEATH IS NO MORE!!!

Let us pray,

Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

BLESSINGS and PEACE to ALL!!!
+MWH

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